



# Writing to Reflect: Quotes for Quick Writing, Reflection, and Discussion

## Writing to Reflect

Educator Parker Palmer talks about the importance of “third things” for teacher renewal and growth—poems, images, or ideas outside our immediate learning community that we can look at together, discuss, and analyze. These materials from outside our environment can serve as catalysts for viewing our learning and collaboration with colleagues with new eyes.

We’ve found quotes are wonderful “third things” for writing about learning, change, and professional development. Putting pen to paper forces anyone to think through issues and ideas with a greater depth. By focusing with colleagues on the same quote and writing about it, we find common ground and a starting point for exploring differences in how we view curriculum, students, and our strengths or needs as educators.

This e-Guide includes ten different quotes from a range of educators, activists, authors, and innovators. We like to throw out a quote and have study group participants write silently in response during study group meetings, especially when we find the group is getting into a rut. These quotes are also helpful in one-on-one coaching or mentoring sessions; we write at the same time we ask our colleagues to respond to the quote, so that they gain some insight into our learning even as we seek insight into theirs.

The quotes are formatted so that they can be easily photocopied and used in any setting. But if that seems a little too worksheet-like for your tastes, they are short enough to be copied onto a whiteboard before colleagues write out responses in journals, or sent over school e-mail as a “Reflection Quote of the Month,” or compiled on one page and copied for everyone to paste into their notebooks or journals as prompts when facing writer’s block in writing about professional learning.

Some of these quotes are terrific for launching a study group at the beginning of the school year. Others are best for jumpstarting reflection during the dreariest stretches of the winter. The questions after the quotes are designed to help you think about ways to adapt the reflection to your needs or interests, but it’s likely you’ll want to tweak them a bit to fit your setting and how your learning community is evolving.

### **Reference**

Palmer, Parker. 1997. *The Courage to Teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

## Writing to Reflect

*It is not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?*

Henry David Thoreau

Think of a time recently in your classroom or your profession when you were very busy but felt fulfilled with the work. Describe it here:

Now think of another time when you were busy but felt rushed and dissatisfied with the work. Describe it here:

What is the difference between the two experiences? What does it tell you about your work habits and pacing in your classroom?

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*I've come to believe there are only two things you need in any new teaching situation to succeed—humility and inquiry.*

Lisa Delpit

What do you want to learn more about as a teacher this year?

What's humbling about your knowledge base or experiences in this area?

How can you go about learning more?

How can your colleagues help you with this inquiry?

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*Realize that change is not always a process of improvement. Sometimes it is a process of invention. When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, he didn't start by trying to improve the candle. He decided he wanted better light and went from there.*

Wendy Kopp

What practice are you trying to improve--forever tinkering with--that might just be better to abandon and start from scratch with a new practice? Start by looking at the practice and linking it to the end goal. Is there a better way to get to that goal?

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*Several years ago, a platoon of Hungarian soldiers got lost in the Alps. One of the soldiers found a map in his pocket, and the troops used it to get out safely. Subsequently, however, the soldiers discovered that the map they had used was, in fact, a drawing of another mountain range, the Pyrenes. I just love that story because it illustrates that when you're confused, almost any old strategic plan can help you discover what's going on and what should be done next.*

Karl Weick

Think of a time when you had a very clear plan or curricular roadmap for studying a topic in your classroom, and as the plan progressed you and your students found yourselves heading in a completely different direction.

Why did this happen?

Where was the value in the original plan?

What was the value of charting a different course?

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*Staff development should not be perceived as something we do unto the weaker teacher or reserve for inexperienced staff members. All staff members, including principals, consultants, and teacher mentors, should be able to announce, "This is my year to study -----." There needs to be a genuine feeling that no one has arrived. Everyone needs to be swept up by the deeply engrained value placed on adult learning.*

Shelley Harwayne

What's the most important thing you want to learn more about through professional development this year?

How is it different from or connected to what your colleagues are studying?

How is this adult learning valued in the school community?

How might it be valued more?

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*The problem isn't that I'm a good teacher, or even a terrible teacher. The problem is some days I appear to be a twit who's been let loose among children.*

Sylvia Ashton Warner

What connections do you make to this quote?

Does the quote offend you? Why or why not?



## Writing to Reflect

*All things are created twice. . . there's a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation to all things.*

—Stephen R. Covey

Think of some specific practice in your classroom (i.e., read aloud, writing conferences, reading groups) that isn't going as well as you would like. Close your eyes and imagine what the practice would look like ideally.

What would you be doing?

What would the students be doing?

What's the first step you need to take to move that mental image to a physical reality?

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*Listening looks easy, but it is not simple. Every head is a world.*

Cuban Proverb

Think of one student's head you have not been able to enter this year.

What questions might you ask to learn more about his or her interests?

What questions might you ask in a discussion a parent or family member?

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*Looking back across my timeline through school, and indeed in the early days of teaching, I see one good thing about being filled with insecurities. Knowing that I had everything to gain, I seemed to seek out mentors.*

Shirley McPhillips

List three of your most important literacy mentors. These can be mentors who helped you learn to teach, or mentors who opened up the world of reading and writing to you. After each name, note the qualities they had as mentors that were most helpful to you.

1.

2.

3.

## Writing to Reflect

*There are two or three things I know for sure, yeah, two or three things I know for sure. The problem is they are never the same things, and I'm never as certain of them as I would like to be.*

Dorothy Allison

Name two or three principles for teaching reading or writing that you “know for sure”—of which you are certain beyond a doubt:

Now name two or three principles for teaching reading or writing that you were once certain of, but now doubt:

What changed your bedrock beliefs?